6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
EH1 Greece EH1

[Town Life]

To own land or buildings that will produce an income without personal effort is for most Greeks the pinnacle of ambition; and those who fall short of this ideal but still manage to escape the necessity of manual work sometimes allow the nail of the little finger on one hand to grow long as public proof of their privileged status.

Most Greek towns are predominantly commercial centers. Small shops, run by the members of a single family, are far more typical than any larger enterprise. There is a tremendous proliferation of independent entrepreneurs, working often on a shoestring. Even the employees of a larger concern are very likely to dabble on the side in buying or selling some commodity or service, partly because wages and salaries are low and hours are short, but partly also because no Greek really likes to work for someone else if he can possibly work for himself.

This phenomenon is intimately connected with the tight-knit character of Greek families. The members of a family group are ready and willing to work hard for the common benefit, and can usually arrange for a distribution of the profits among themselves without undue quarreling. But a man employed by an outsider, bound to him by no family ties, finds it hard not to feel that he is being exploited. Why should a stranger hire him if not to make something out of him? And why, then, should an employee not do his best to look after himself first and foremost, help his family and relatives next, and let the interests of the larger enterprise in which he is a mere hired hand take a poor third place in his loyalties?

The result is that when enterprises grow large, and employ persons not bound together by family relationships, they tend to lose much of the efficiency and esprit de corps of the small family undertaking. Nepotism and other forms of special favors done for relatives creep in. Given the strength of Greek family ties, promotion by the cold-blooded criterion of the individual's usefulness to an impersonal organization can scarcely prevail

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
EH1 Greece EH1
Paleo Corinthos

[Villages of the Plains]

higher than wages for unskilled labor in Athens. It is these wage rates, of course, that have attracted new settlers from the hills; but the fact that such labor is seasonal, lasting for only about four months in the year, means that families depending entirely on wage work are often in very hard straits.

The unparalleled prosperity that the years since 1953 have brought to the farmers of Corinth has been accompanied by the development of a number of nonagricultural occupations within the village. Several new stores and two new coffee houses have come into existence as well as the fancy restaurant for tourists. A number of persons also make a living as tourist guides. The richest men in the village, however, are merchants who have organized the delivery of tomatoes and other vegetables to the Athens market; they employ truck drivers, not all of whom live in the village. The two cooperatives employ, between them, a full-time, professionally trained secretary. The museum has a small staff of caretakers and curators. The village school had 210 pupils in 1956 and employed three teachers. A priest officiates in a handsome new church, which the villagers have built out of their own resources. Old Corinth, in other words, is developing into a small town, and ceasing to be a mere village. If the plan, only talked about in 1956, for establishing a small canning factory to preserve tomatoes is ever realized, the transition to a town status will become definite.

Nevertheless, from one point of view, the community has so far remained thoroughly traditional in its social organization. The substantial farmers of Old Corinth continue to adhere to age-old patterns of family life. When it comes time for their children to marry, the daughters are dowered, partly with money and partly with a share of crop land, vineyard and olive grove; and sons, similarly, inherit their portion of the parental farm. Clearly, if there are more than two children – and this is almost universally the case – the new generation will have to

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957

EH1 Greece EH1

Cherasia

[Hill Villages]

city, was almost idle, so that serious unemployment was endemic in Volos, thus effectively blocking the easiest and most immediate escape for the hillsmen of Cherasia. In the Thessalian plain, villages like Lofiscos have not developed their agriculture to a level of intensity that would offer seasonal employment on a significant scale. Hence, for the time being the people of Cherasia are caught in a net scarcely of their own devising. At the same time they are stubbornly and angrily doing little or nothing to help themselves. It is not a hopeful situation, and if the general political climate of Greece should change, another guerrilla band could very likely be recruited from Cherasia without difficulty and at a moment's notice.

166 621 433 464 [669]

KARDAMILI

Kardamili lies on the sea, and can thus be described as a hill village only by looking inland, where high and barren hillsides rise abruptly from the coast, with only a small stream and a miniature delta to explain the location of the community. It is situated on the west coast of the central peninsula of the southern Peloponnese. Just to the south lies the wild and desolate country of Mani, a region where tribal organization and blood feud lasted into the twentieth century.

621 [361] [133]

Kardamili raises a little wheat in the stream delta, but its major crop is olives. The rocky hillsides are covered with trees, skillfully planted in crevices and pockets of soil, many of which have been created artificially by terracing. The villagers reckon that they produce enough wheat to supply the community for about four months in the year; the rest has to be imported with money gained through the sale of olive oil.

621 433 [241] [438]

Before the war, Kardamili added to its strictly agricultural resources by acting as a commercial center for a number of inland villages. They, too, exported olive oil, together with a few

[366] [438] [491]

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
EH1 Greece EH1
Kardamili

[Hill Villages]

animals; and before roads were built, these villages brought their surplus on donkey-back (or on the hoof) to Kardamili, where it was put on board a small ship, and carried either to Athens or to Kalamata, the local metropolis, some thirty-five miles away on the rich Messenian plain. In addition, an oil-pressing plant was constructed in 1929 in Kardamili which employed as many as a hundred persons at the height of the season. Even when there were no olives to press, the plant kept open the year around by making soap and other products.

This was the basis upon which about 750 people were able to make a living in the village before the war. In recent years, however, the village has not prospered. The oil factory closed down permanently in 1940, depriving the village of what had been one of its most important resources. After the war, a new road, built in 1949–50, destroyed the importance of the port. Instead of bringing their olives to Kardamili on donkey-back and selling them there, the peasants of the hinterland loaded their produce directly onto trucks bound for Kalamata or Athens.

The new system was an obvious improvement on older methods of transport and marketing; but it meant that Kardamili, which for a few years between the wars had struggled toward becoming a miniature town, was compelled to sink back to a purely village status. One manifestation of this change is a decrease in population. In 1940, the village had about 750 inhabitants; in 1956 the population totaled only 512. War losses were insignificant, although guerrillas did kill two persons from the village. The whole community was forcibly evacuated to Kalamata in 1949 to prevent its exploitation by guerrilla bands that ranged even this far south. The evacuation was perhaps scarcely justified, however, since the guerrillas never again came near, and when the villagers returned in 1950 they found their houses intact.